

Ward Avenue United Presbyterian Church
Northeast corner of Ward and Colridge avenues
Llyswen Neighborhood
Altoona
Blair County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5909

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
WARD AVENUE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

HABS No. PA-5909

Location: Northeast corner of Ward and Coleridge avenues

Date of Erection: 1913

Description: The scale, form, and finish of this small wood-frame church evoke a decidedly English village context. Primary architectural elements of this evocation are the steeply pitched slate roof, parapeted gable ends, and a veneer of rock-faced limestone ashlar laid in random courses, along with the building's squat, nearly square form. Ecclesiastical signage is understated but unmistakable. A tripartite arrangement of Gothic, stained-glass windows stretches toward the high peak of each parapet wall, flanked by narrow buttresses whose positions are expressed by stepped interruptions in the parapet slopes. Steps, sills, and parapet copings are cut limestone. The sanctuary occupies the entire first floor of the building; smaller meeting rooms, offices, and facilities are in the full basement. The sanctuary is further illuminated by three double stained-glass windows and a stained-glass dormer light on the Ward Avenue facade. Worshippers enter via a varnished wood double door with stained-glass lights and fanlight, protected by a rustic, exposed-timber porch facing Coleridge Avenue. The rustic tone carries over into the sanctuary's dark wood finishes and heavy ceiling brackets.

History: In 1904, less than a year after voting to investigate the need for a mission in South Altoona, the Huntingdon Presbytery established a Union Sunday School at Lakemont Terrace. The presbytery officially recognized the South Altoona Presbyterian Church on October 19, 1906, and appointed W. P. Benedict as pastor. The new congregation's sanctuary was a wood-frame chapel on Ridge Avenue above Ruskin Drive, a site donated by Anna Baker on behalf of the Baker estate. The church purchased the Llysven site for \$1,500 in 1907 from PRR car repairer James M. Curtis of Eldorado Station; he had obtained it a year earlier for \$750 from Stephen Martin and Charles Gearhart, listed in the 1906-07 city directory as "Martin & Gearhart, grocers, 101 Ward Avenue." They purchased the lot from the Altoona Suburban Home Company in March 1906. The 1906 directory also indicates that Stephen and Annie Martin lived on Ward Avenue near Logan Avenue, possibly above or behind the store building at the back of the present lot. The 1909 Sanborn map identifies a one-and-a-half story wood-frame building with a small porch facing Ward Avenue as Ward Avenue Presbyterian Church, suggesting a revision of local accounts of the church's history, which hold that the chapel on Ridge Avenue was moved to the Llysven site in 1911. It is possible that the store and the transplanted chapel were incorporated to form one building large enough for the congregation's temporary needs. The cornerstone for the present building was laid in 1912; the completed church was dedicated on March 30, 1913. Assessed value of the new building was \$4,000. The church purchased the house at 101 Coleridge (HABS No. PA-5873) as a manse from Percy Rich in 1919. In 1924 the congregation celebrated the installation of an impressive Estey pipe organ.

The South Altoona Presbyterian Church did not officially change its name to reflect its new location until 1948. The present name was adopted in 1968.

Sources: Maps: 1909, 1920, 1932, 1951. City directories. Tax records. Deed books: 166/426, 167/660, 178/146. Altoona Mirror: October 19, 1936; December 20, 1947 (early photos). Ward Avenue United Presbyterian Church directories: 1974, 1988. Interview: James Spence, 314 Coleridge Ave., July 18, 1989.

Project Information: This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Altoona, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), Randy Cooley, director. An overview of the history of the city (HABS No. PA-5784) and an overview of Llysven (HABS No. PA-5787) provide context for these buildings as well as a comprehensive list of sources. See also additional HABS reports on buildings in the city and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Kathy Edwards in the summer of 1989 under the supervision of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS historian, and Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian. Edwards's and other project historians' work was published as Railroad City: Four Historic Neighborhoods in Altoona, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1990), edited by Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.